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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001958

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: Maldivian President Gayoom inaugurated for sixth term; He calls for reforms and reshuffles cabinet

Refs: (A) White House Washington DC DTG 071859Z Nov 03
- (B) Colombo 1819, and previous (All Notal)

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: On November 11, Maldivian President Gayoom was inaugurated to his sixth term in office. In a brief speech given at the ceremony, Gayoom called for increased democratization and announced that he was creating a "human rights commission." He did not refer to the September unrest that shook the country. Later that day, Gayoom swore in his new, slightly reshuffled cabinet. In his speech, Gayoom appeared to be signaling that he understands that there needs to be political change in the Maldives, but he was very vague on his precise plans. END SUMMARY.

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Gayoom's Inauguration
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2. (SBU) On November 11, Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who has been in power since 1978, was inaugurated to his sixth term in office. The ceremony took place in Male', the capital of the Maldives, at the People's Majlis (Parliament) building. In the elegant, wood-lined parliamentary chamber, all 50 members of the Majlis were in attendance, as were other top officials of the Maldivian government (GoRM), including about a dozen, colorfully clad jurists (furry red hats, white robes) from the government's Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs. Off to one corner, sat members of Gayoom's extensive family. High-level foreign dignitaries were also present, including Indian Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani. Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Tyrone Fernando was also there, looking very preoccupied (no doubt worried about the situation in Colombo). In light of the ongoing cohabitation tensions in Sri Lanka, the Colombo-based diplomatic corps that was present was mostly mid-level, with polchief representing the U.S.

3. (U) On November 10, polchief had provided the MFA a copy of President Bush's letter of congratulations to President Gayoom (see Ref A). The GoRM was very appreciative.

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Speech calls for Reforms
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4. (SBU) After he was sworn in over a copy of the Koran, Gayoom gave a brief speech in Dhivehi, the local language. An English-language translation of the speech was later provided to the diplomatic corps. The speech was vaguely linked to the GoRM's "Maldives Vision 2020," a long-term economic/social planning document that was developed several years ago by the government. In a noteworthy new focus for the Maldivian government, however, the key sections of the speech dealt mainly with political reform issues. Outlining five key areas that are part of an overall "action plan," Gayoom stated, in part:

"The first area of focus deals with the strengthening of democratic institutions and the processes of government...The second key area of action involves placing emphasis on establishing a government that listens and works with the people, and to introduce institutional mechanisms to facilitate these processes...The third principal area of action will focus on streamlining and reducing the size of the public service, on increasing productivity, and promoting the values of service, honesty, and integrity, especially in relation to public property and finance...The fourth area of action aims at instituting modern management practices and re-orienting government departments to be more result-oriented...The fifth area of action will focus on strengthening the role of the family in society and on promoting greater participation of all sectors of the society in nation-building."

5. (C) While sketching out plans in these five areas, however, Gayoom did so in only the most general way. No

detail whatsoever was given on how to activate the People's Majlis, for example, although it basically acts as a rubber stamp for the president's decisions without much debate. The lone exception to Gayoom's general approach was his announcement that he was creating a "national commission on human rights." Gayoom did not elaborate on who would serve on the commission and exactly when it would be formed. By way of a brief explanation, he did say that the commission would "safeguard the civil liberties enshrined in the Constitution of the Maldives, and protect and promote human rights in the country."

16. (SBU) The speech did not contain any direct reference to the September 2003 unrest that rocked Male' following a police firing at a prison on another island (see Ref B).

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Cabinet Reshuffle
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17. (C) Late November 11 and per Maldivian custom on presidential inauguration day, Gayoom swore in his new cabinet. Despite some rumors that there might be large-scale changes, it was only slightly reshuffled, with many names remaining the same. Foreign Minister Fathulla Jameel, for example, was kept in that slot, which he has now held for almost 25 years. Abdulla Hameed, a close relative of Gayoom's, was also kept on as Speaker of the People's Majlis and Minister of Atolls Development. In addition, Gayoom remained as commander-in-chief of the military and the police, the Minister of Defense and National Security, and Minister of Finance and the Treasury. There were some noteworthy changes, though, including:

-- Home Ministry: The new home minister is Ismail Shafeeu, who had formerly been education minister. Shafeeu has served as home minister in past cabinets.

-- Planning Ministry: The new planning minister is Hamdoon Hameed, who had previously been deputy in the ministry. He replaces Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, who was dropped from the cabinet.

-- Attorney General: The new attorney general is Hassan Saeed. Saeed had been a high court judge. He replaces Mohammed Munavvar, who was dropped from the cabinet. Munavvar reputedly may be offered another governmental position, perhaps an embassy. Both Saeed and Munavvar hail from Addu Atoll, the Maldives' southernmost group of islands (see Ref B).

-- Education Ministry: Dr. Maumood Shauggee replaces Ismail Shafeeu as education minister. Shauggee, who was educated in Canada, had been the deputy in the ministry.

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COMMENT
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18. (C) Although he did not mention the September unrest, the unprecedented nature of what happened at that time was clearly the key background to Gayoom's speech. In outlining his "action" items, he appeared to be signaling that he understands that there needs to be political change in the Maldives so that the government becomes more inclusive and responsive to public demands. Given the almost purposeful vagueness of the speech, however, it is not clear how serious he really is in implementing these overall objectives. On the positive side of the ledger, a number of contacts remarked to polchief during the course of the trip that Gayoom and his supporters have appeared more interested in soliciting views from outside of leadership circles in the past several weeks. That said, although some technocrats were given slots in the reshuffle, the cabinet remains filled with cronies and close relatives of Gayoom's. If further political turbulence down the line is going to be averted, Gayoom clearly needs to apply himself to adding meat to his general principles.
END COMMENT.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

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